

Evaluating Work-Life Balance in the Department of Defense

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Ongoing combat operations in Afghanistan and, most recently, the economic recession have led to a large increase in the number of Department of Defense (DoD) Personnel. Data from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) reveal that the number of active duty military personnel increased by 18,566 between fiscal years 2008 and 2009 (a growth of 1.3%). At the same time, many senior military members postponed retirement to shield themselves from the struggling economy. As a result of these events, the all-volunteer military force has swelled to almost 1.5 million (DMDC, 2009). Despite the rationale for joining the DoD, this career choice is dangerous and full of uncertainty. An unfortunate consequence of the aforementioned has been multiple deployments, especially for those in the National Guard and Reserve components. The subsequent absence of one or both parents has been detrimental to the family unit, especially children. Given these trends, it is imperative to evaluate perceptions of work/life initiatives in the United States Military.

Many occupations cause stress for employees, but few are as stressful as serving in the DoD, due to high job stress, low autonomy, and long work hours (Pflanz & Ogle, 2006, p.861). Unique stressors for military personnel include "risk of injury or death, geographic mobility, periodic separation of the service member from the rest of the family, shift work, residence in foreign countries, and normative pressures controlling behavior outside of working time" (Segal, 1989, p. 7). The Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research conducted a review of military work-family

conflict literature which found a negative effect of work-family conflict on soldiers' physical health, mental health, and job satisfaction (Durand, Burrell, Stetz, & Castro, 2003).

Additionally, increased Military Operational Tempo (OPTEMPO) led to higher levels of work-family conflict and negative impacts on Army outcomes such as commitment and quality of life (Durand et al., 2003). Finally, a 2007 RAND study on military marriages indicated that since the beginning of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, divorce rates have significantly increased for the active component. This increase may be due in part to the increased stress being placed on service members and their families.

Karasek's "job strain" model states employees facing high psychological workload demands or pressures combined with low control (decision latitude) in meeting those demands experience high levels of stress. Job demands are work stressors emanating from the nature of the work, such as working very fast and/or repetitiveness, whereas job decision latitude is defined as both the ability to use skills on the job and the decision-making authority available to the worker (1979). Previous literature has demonstrated that occupational pressures, job demands and strain, heavy workload, and uncertainty are common among service members, and these factors may result in a fragmented family structure and increased strain on family life (Adams, Jex, & Cunningham, 2006; RAND, National Defense Research Institute, 2007).

Increasing the organizational support for service members' family lives may increase satisfaction with work-life balance. Examples of family-friendly organizational policies include flextime, telework, paternity leave, and daycare (Frye & Breaugh, 2004; Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, *in press*). Durand et al. (2003) found that when soldiers viewed their unit as more "family-friendly" their levels of work-family conflict decreased while commitment to the Army and health outcomes increased. In a study by Frye & Breaugh (2004) using a civilian sample, increased perceptions of organizational family-friendly policies significantly decreased work-family conflict. Finally, a recent study by Kossek, et al. (*in press*) indicates that family-supportive organizational perceptions (FSOP) are shown to significantly predict levels of work-family conflict.

In this session, we will discuss a recent study in which over 1,500 active duty military personnel were surveyed on the value of work/life balance initiatives. More

specifically, this study assessed respondents' intentions to remain as active duty members at the end of their current obligation, their level of satisfaction with various aspects of the military (including financial, personal, and family-related services), incentives to remain active duty, and future career plans. Results indicated that though many intend to remain active duty at the end of their current obligation, they are dissatisfied with the balance between their work and family lives. These results will be discussed, as well as possible implications of the findings. Further, initiatives developed by the services to help alleviate some of the dissatisfaction with work-life balance will be presented. For example, the Navy's Task Force Life/Work offers opportunities such as extended maternity leave, paternity leave, and opportunities for telework.

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